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EXPLOITATION!**
David Chute talks to the King of Sin

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COMMENT



Dr. Ruth,
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at the Drive-In!

Women in Prison!

Men in 'Chainsaw'!

And Let's Not Forget:

'Sid and Nancy' • 'Aliens'
'Ruthless People'

HEY, LIGHTEN UP!...IT'S SUMMER!

L.M. Kit Carson dismembers John Hooper on 'Chain Saw Massacre II': page 9

'Saw' Thru

by L.M. Kit Carson

I'm always looking for a harder, nastier, crazier sting in the work. One you can taste.

—Tobe Hooper

“...E EEWooaaaaaooooo
nnnnnaaaaceccyyyiiiiiA
AAAAAYYYaaahhhhh
hhhhgggaaaaaaaAAAAAAAaaaaa
aaaaa...”

“This one line of dialogue goes on for about the last 23 minutes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (a.k.a. *Saw I*),” says Tobe Hooper, who directed it. “It covers the infamous, excruciating Dinner Table Sequence (which was filmed non-stop for 36 hours straight until the last pennies of the \$160,000 budget ran out). It may be the longest solid scream-track ever to shake out darkened American movie houses.”

I first squirmed through it back in 1975 in a tiny, dumpy screening room just below Sunset Boulevard. I was newly exiled from Texas and had known Tobe Hooper as a good documentary filmmaker (*Peter, Paul, and Mary in Concert*; 1971) in Austin but had no way to be prepared for the bite of *The Saw*. I flat couldn't take it—neither could Paul Schrader, a curious friend who'd come along to the screening; about midway through the movie we buzzed the projectionist to skip a couple of reels and just show us the end. *Whu*: this sucker could really hurt you.

Post-screening, blinking in the daylight leaning on our cars, Schrader and I tried to figure out what we'd run into.

Brian DePalma and George Romero had only recently corkscrewed fresh blood into the horror genre (*Sisters*, *Night of the Living Dead*); but they were sophisto guys who'd kept the “it's-only-a-movie” deal with the audience. Hooper was a new deal—simply this: *no deal*. Hooper was a scare-director who was methodically unsafe, who the audience (you) finally just couldn't trust. Kind of like *Life Its Ownself*. He'd go too far, then go farther, and go farther, and go farther again, and kick it again, and then it's over,

then get in an extra kick, then it's over... then one more kick...

No deal, friend.

Burnt Matches.

Tobe Hooper, b. 1942, Austin, Texas.

“I was a fanatic film fan from before birth. My mother had to be taken out of the State Theatre in Austin

straight to the hospital in labor. Probably it was one of those good, good black-and-white Michael Curtiz pictures she didn't want to leave. My mother and father loved movies. As soon as I was out of the hospital, I was taken with them to the movies. And I literally grew up in the movies.”

Hooper spent his first two years in Austin. His father had a crackerbox-



No more Yuppie-mobile.

shaped limestone hotel on Congress, the main street, about four blocks from the Texas State Capitol building. The hotel was squared on all four sides by moviehouses (the Paramount, the State, the Queen, the Capitol) whose marquees changed every other day in the wartime Forties so there was a new movie to see every day. Hooper wet-nursed on three, four movies a day, plus cartoons.

"I can remember my first 6mm lens-shot looking up out of the crib at the shadows dancing on the ceiling. At the same time I was learning to talk, I was learning to see everything in camera coverage: wide shots, close-ups, etc. I didn't exactly know I did this until I was about 20: one evening outside San Francisco I was watching the Pacific Ocean from a cliffside—suddenly the Panavision aperture in my head widened and went away. And I realized that all those damn years I'd been shooting movies, with and without a camera."

At age four, Hooper made his first with-camera shot: *NUT*, of a small bronze horse statue he now keeps on a shelf in his living room. Then he started shooting hundreds of 8mm mimic-movies on \$5 budgets casting cousins and friends, using a war-surplus three-lens Bell & Howell spring-wind camera.

By ten, Hooper had decided (after toying with the notion of being a mad scientist) to be a director. The grade school principal had called him into the office and warned that his classmates were weirded out by Hooper's movie-ness. Too late, Mr. Principal: Hooper was cranking out a new movie nearly daily, showing them at his house—and charging the neighborhood 50¢ a head. The kid had found out about boxoffice.

Last semi-*Rosebud* flashback: Hooper, like many brotherless/sisterless kids, collected special odd bunches of things. Maybe a way to fill up a solitary world. One collection was cigar boxes of burnt wooden matches. "Yeh, I used to pick 'em up all around in ashtrays and save 'em," Hooper shakes his head. "Don't know why. I think I thought they looked lonely." Lonely burnt matches? Check *Man and His Symbols*.

Odds For The Future

"After my folks split up, I lived with my mother. But my father became terminally ill when I was a teenager, and I moved to Grand Prairie [near Dallas] to be with him for his

last four years. There I made my first 16mm sound film, \$1100 budget, called *The Abyss*. Things were kind of dark around me in those days watching my father dying."

After his father's death, Hooper returned to Austin and into the University of Texas Film Department (population, 2: Tobe Hooper and the Film Instructor).

Hooper got a part-time job making 20-minute sales-tool shorts for a local insurance company—insidious little dramas to pitch fear into families. Like what happens after Dad gets mashed to death in a three-car accident: lose the home; the dog runs away; finally the 12-year-old daughter hits the streets hooking. Like what are the Odds For The Future: a hundred little golden plaster of Paris men standing on a wonderful wide horizon; 95 of these figures abruptly explode; *that's* the odds; don't bet on it, pal.

After he'd made almost 50 of these bum trips, Hooper got a call from the insurance company president congratulating him for helping to boost sales—plus a suggestion that Hooper start studying the obituary columns so he could go shoot telephoto footage of real grief-filled funerals. Hooper quit.

Then, unaccountably, the insurance prez called Hooper back. He had been truly impressed with Hooper's work in scaring lots of money out of insurance buyers. He offered to bankroll a short film, no joke.

At 21, Hooper wrote and directed *The Heisters*, a 35mm, ten-minute, color comedy about three medieval outlaws who get into an absurdly escalated *Road Runner*-cartoon fight over their stolen booty. It won awards at the 'fours, Cannes, and San Francisco film festivals. And for better or worse, it made Hooper a big shot in and around his hometown.

"I got a little bit swelled up—some people said I got so high and mighty that you couldn't hit me in the ass with a red apple. Maybe so."

Over the next eight years Hooper schemed up his future. He formed three film-production houses in Austin; shot industrials and documentaries for PBS, the Texas Highway Department, etc. Finally he pooled enough money and power to finance his first feature, *Eggshells*. It was about the breakdown of a commune, a slightly surreal, end-of-hippiedom love story. This movie was going to be Hooper's ticket to Tomorrow. But this was 1972: spacey hippies were media-dated history; Nixon was in solid; Watergate was just a hotel. *Eggshells* got

50 play-dates. Minus-zero boxoffice.

Hooper had forgotten the Odds For The Future.

'Saw 1

"One of the things messing with the audience in the 'Saw' movies are these characters that get around and wallow around down in the grave and make artful objects out of brains and guts.... This sort of messing gets connected to the persona of The Grand and Master of Monsters, The One and The Only—which is Death itself. The Grim Reaper."

"So in 'Saw 1' when I took hold and started screwing around with this Chainsaw Family who'd snapped into the persona of Death, I was getting these horrendous shocks and jolts myself. Because *that's* what gives me the creeps, gives me the willies: Death. And all the accouterments and symbols of Death—the quilted satin, the shiny \$22,000 coffin, embalming room, the moment when the lilies come. That stuff frightens me. I'm afraid of it."

"This crazy chainsaw bunch had an edge that touched me awfully deep down. And I felt if I held on and kept going I'd maybe touch nerves in the audience that are ordinarily covered up—ultimate subconscious, terribly disturbing, nasty, sticky fears of Death."

Eggshells' smashup fried Hooper. Near broke at Christmas '72, he got tangled in the last-minute-shopper mob at a Montgomery Ward and shoved into the heavy equipment department—suddenly he was standing face to face with a big wall display of glinting chainsaws. All sizes. Row above row. An uneasy-making sight mixed with the tinsel, bright Christmas balls, red ribbons. *Whu.*

And an abrupt Christmas crackup thought flicker-lit a few of Hooper's brainy synapses: *Quickest damn way out of here tonight is just to yank-start one of those chainsaws and cut a path to the door.* It was a joke, but only a half-joke. An image that sold itself a bit too strongly.

Hooper got the hell out of Montgomery Ward, went home with a chainsaw in his brain, and started piecing together a movie. "In about 30 seconds I saw the movie right in front of me."

He had part of a script about hippies in a haunted house. And he had some leftover childhood nightmares about a wacko Fifties mass murderer in Plainfield, Wisconsin, named Ed Gein—Gein



Hooper parts red sea (of blood) while Carson thinks, "Did I write that?"

had been the usual sweetheart handyman/baby-sitter type who also gutted and flayed drifters, made skin lamp shades, bone furniture, kept his freezer stacked with human hearts. [Hooper's relatives knew folks from Plainfield and sometimes used to get a kick out of telling Hooper the kid booger stories about Ed Gein at bedtime.]

Hooper ran the hippies into the mass murderer and handed that booger a chainsaw. Bango.

"One other thing messing with the audience in the 'Saw' movies is that these deadly Chainsaw brothers are funny. They're funny as hell. And the audience gets that joke.

"I've noted this happen in screenings more and more often as the years go on. At some horrible, tragic moment when

the last girl is facing death with these lunatic brothers bubbling and squabbling all around her, the audience starts laughing...then gets caught, catches itself...then starts feeling guilty for laughing...then starts laughing again at feeling guilty for laughing... So then the audience schizes right out not knowing what side of the fence they're on: killers or victims? And intellectually/emotionally, they get on both sides of the fence. Just to have it covered and be safe. And without realizing that, *this* way, they've made themselves completely *unsafe* and questionable as moral beings.

"It's wild behavior. Seems involuntary. It's another part of this movie that maybe touches people in places they may not want to be touched. Places they normally hide and shield."

'Saw 2

Near Christmas '85 Hooper asked me to consider the 'Saw sequel. He needed a *yes* or *no* by January 1 because the movie had already been slotted to open in 1800 movie houses on August 22.

Agents, lawyers, and pro movie-pals sneered lists of reasons for saying no:

- 1) Women-hating slasher sleaze yuk;
- 2) The Sequel-itis Curse;
- 3) Wipes your name right off the Serious Screenwriters' Map;
- 4) No way to write-shoot-produce a *real* movie in seven months, etc.

I liked all the reasons (best: the Screenwriters' Map, lemme see that map).

However, I'd worked with Hooper

before (1978: *Dead and Alive*, a project now neatly dead on a shelf at Warners). I know Hooper has a trick for breaking in the back door to true strangeness, real madness. I know because he took me into that crazy place a few times during *Dead and Alive*—scared the hell outta me—yeh, Hooper's got a trick not many people know. He stands there grinning, drinking a Dr. Pepper, and smoking a havana and says, "Y'ever been in Door Number 3?... You been in with The Lady. You been in with The Tiger....Don't you wanna go in Door Number 3?" Spielberg tried to learn how to do *that* by producing

Poltergeist; didn't work.

"It's important for a movie today to do more than tell a story. You've got to send a *physical* sensation through the audience and not let them off the hook.

"I like to just make it go faster and faster and faster and pumping and pumping and banging and banging until I get...*in to you*. Turn the visual and sound experience into a *harmonic* that mesmerizes the audience, takes them right off into a hypnotic zone where they're no longer thinking about how it's done—they're just *there* in a lucid place like those moments right before waking up. They're just out

there. Physically.

"I'd love to suspend an audience out like that for 90 minutes. Kubrick knows how to do it. You can come out of a good Kubrick movie different from the way you were when you went in. That's what I'm going to try to do."

Do *Saw* 2? You bet: it's about croissants; it's about chainsaws; it's about to get you.

Film Fan Footnote: I've still not seen all of *Saw 1*. Schrader claims he did watch it all the way through once locked in a car at a rundown drive-in outside Shreveport, Louisiana. He claims.



Scene from original "Texas Chainsaw Massacre."

Choice Cuts

Legendary script doctor on Paris Texas, diarist, and heart-lung specialist on the remake of *Breathless*, L.M. Kit Carson handed over his original screenplay for *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* for excerpting here along with his dismemberment of director Tobe Hooper (page 9). Though Carson warned that should we pass his script on to film critics and such, "Leatherface has your address," we snipped out the following five scenes for you. We'll axe the usual introductory blather about what directors, actors, the d.p., and ketchupmaster do to help you believe you are there, and just say that reading it over lunch we laughed out loud. The one thing you can't do is cover your eyes. *Chainsaw 2* has method and metaphor, so it's okay to like it. —H.J.

Glad I Saw Ya'

FADE IN:

EXT. TWO-LANE HILL ROAD—END OF DAY

Disembodied VOICES from a car radio blip across the wide Texas sky. White convertible MERCEDES zooms wildly down a country hill toward an endless flatland.

TEENAGE GIRL (RADIO): ...an that's for Glen and couldya tell the girls at Plano Central High to just leave him alone....

LADY DJ STRETCH (RADIO): ...Got it and I believe it: Glen is off-limits now! This is Stretch keeping the dedication line open on K-OKLA in Burkburnett.... Here by the ol' Red River on the tip-top of the Dallas/Ft. Worth metropolx.

An armadillo starts to cross the two-lane near a road sign: "Mesquite 17 mi./Dallas 24 mi." The Mercedes whips past the road sign. The passenger shoots a hole in the two 1's in "Dallas." The armadillo is spun into a ball by the force of the passing Mercedes. And the balled-up critter rolls and bounces down the hill in the car's wind-drag.

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES—END OF DAY

TWO TEXAS TEEN-YUPPIES drink and yak alone, calling the radio station on the car-phone.

DRIVER: Yo Stretch! From the senior boys at Wheeler High to the senior girls



Hitchhiker and Chop Top (Bill Moseley) on candid camera.

who're so stuck up, play "You're on the Road to Nowhere—"

STRETCH (RADIO): You mean "We're on the Road to Nowhere"?

The gun-wielding passenger grabs the phone, yukking.

GUNNER (INTO PHONE): Nah, babe, we're on the road to Texas/O.U. Weekend in Dallas, you're on the road to Nowhere, hah?

DRIVER: Hook 'em Horns!

Ahead a beat-up PICKUP TRUCK chugs slowly toward the Mercedes from the opposite lane.

STRETCH (RADIO): OK, that's real funny, guys. Wanna hang up now? You're tying up the line.... Hey, c'mon.

The Driver spots the truck.

DRIVER: Check it out, dude: play a

little chicken with the farmer!

The T-Ys hoot in excitement as the Mercedes accelerates into the other lane for the collision game with the old truck.

CUT TO:

The Mercedes veers toward the truck. The truck wavers, then swerves into the other lane. But the Mercedes cuts back head-on at it, as they see-saw back and forth two, three times. The Mercedes won't let the truck get away.

Seconds before the crash, the truck skids off the road as the Mercedes rockets past waving, "Hook 'em Horns" (forefinger and little finger out, the rest of the hand clenched in a fist). This is the hand gesture of support for the Texas football team, nicknamed the Longhorns.

The T-Ys laugh crazily into the phone.

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Night is falling fast outside.

TEEN-YUPS (INTO PHONE): Ya got that, babe? Hot ride: stick with us!

STRETCH (RADIO): Yah, later sports. Just hang up, OK?

TEEN-YUPS (INTO PHONE): No way! We got a lot more requests!

CUT TO:

INT. K-OKLA RADIO STATION—DAY
(END OF DAY)

K-OKLA is a very low-tech small town radio station, a three-man operation above a gun store.

STRETCH, the DJ, is a rangy Sam Shepard sexpot cowgirl who's quit riding horses to ride airwaves. She's signaling "Cut 'em off" frantically (hand jerked hard across throat) to her overalled engineer, L. G. McPETERS, a young Slim Pickens type.

STRETCH: L.G., can't you cut these jerks off?

L.G.: Darlin', I'm tryin'.

STRETCH: Don't call me "Darlin'," dammit.

L.G. cackles, flipping knobs.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO-LANE BRIDGE—NIGHT

Night is down. The Mercedes leaps up an incline on to a long narrow two-lane bridge. The Gunner shoots at the bridge railing. He sees the truck suddenly leap onto the bridge after them—roaring toward the Mercedes, backwards.

GUNNER: Whoa, dude...

Backing up at 90 mph, the truck moves frighteningly fast; catches up to the Mercedes. Then it slaloms over to get beside the Mercedes.

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES—NIGHT

The Driver and Gunner look over at the weirdly reckless truck, slamming along backwards beside them. The same radio station blares out of the truck, making a big stereo sound between the two vehicles. The truck's window is rolled up and masked by a spiderweb crack, the driver can't be seen.

TEEN-YUPS: Whatthefuck?! You crazy? Back off pig-fucker...

Now an odd figure pops up in the bed of the truck: hooded, somehow unreal. The figure jerks back and forth like a big Punch-and-Judy puppet. Crazy as it looks, the darkness makes it even harder to understand.

TEEN-YUPS: What's that?! Lookit! Some kinda geek...

Abruptly the figure grabs up something from the truck bed and yank-starts it, raising it overhead: a chainsaw.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO-LANE BRIDGE—NIGHT

TEEN-YUPS: The geek's gotta—what? what?

The figure whacks at the Mercedes with the chainsaw scratching and chewing up a rear fender.

Whacks again, sparks spraying. Whacks again, catching the convertible roof.

It's happening too fast. The chainsaw's ripping and shredding the convertible roof. The T-Ys duck and yell. The Mercedes can't get away. It's pinned between the truck and the bridge. They can't get away.

TEEN-YUPS: Get away, go! Can't: the bridge! Stand on it! Shoot 'em, shoot the bastard, get him...

The Gunner squirms and dodges, trying to aim and keep away from the flying blade. He gets off a couple of wild shots.

GUNNER: Duck! Stay down, I can't aim! Now!...

The Gunner hits the figure, blowing back the hood, revealing a strange SQUASHED MAN with faint tire-tracks across his face (the HITCHHIKER who was run down by the cattletruck at the end on Chinsaw I). Hits the Squashed Man's neck—the head flops sideways like a puppet-head with the strings cut. Oddly, there's no blood from the wound.

DRIVER: Ya got him! Yee-haw! Good-bye geek!...

But the figure only pauses a split second. Then starts hacking at the Mercedes more frenziedly.

CUT TO:

INT. K-OKLA RADIO STATION—NIGHT

DJ's sliding her earphones, yelling back at the yelling and screaming pouring from the car-phone connection.

STRETCH: Ya hear this, L.G.?

L.G.'s shocking himself pulling wires.

L.G.: They're on a car-phone. I can't disconnect. We're jammed. They gotta hang up [wincles].

Stretch presses one earphone tighter, listening harder.

STRETCH: Buzz-saw...

INT. MERCEDES—NIGHT

It's gotten a lot worse: the roof's flapping open, Gunner's reloading.

The figure makes a last savage swing into the Mercedes with the chainsaw. And suddenly the truck pops from reverse into first gear and zooms away in the opposite direction.

A moment of silence and hard breathing. Gunner hangs out the window yelling and shooting after the disappearing truck.

GUNNER: Missed us, assholes!

Then the Driver slumps a little sideways. Both T-Ys realize that the top of the Driver's head has been sawed through like a slice of pizza. Both start screaming as the Driver's head blows open as the blood geysers straight up through the ripped roof.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. K-O-KIA RADIO STATION-NIGHT

Stretch jerks back hard as the screaming in her earphones peaks into an exploding crash. Abruptly: dead silence. A beat as Stretch thinks it over. Something disturbing just went through her ears.

L.G.: Whu, they cut off.

She shivers involuntarily, blinks.

STRETCH: Yeh... How'd you do it, L.G.?

He waggles his eyebrows seductively.

L.G.: Yeh, I put the underwoolover across the overflapper...urm. Dunno. Just went dead air.

CUT TO:

CREDITS/CHAINSAW MONTAGE:

A series of tableaux of prize Yuppie consumer products: croissants, overpriced designer sport clothes, etc. These might appear to be a bunch of upscale TV commercials: loving close-ups; smooth camera moves, back-lit in that unreal Spielberg glow.

Each tableau is shattered by a rampaging chainsaw.

A sunny oak table heaped with croissants and jams and fruit and sweating pots of coffee and cream and...CHAINSAWED.

White shelves and wicker baskets stacked and strewn with Yuppie-brand sweaters and shirts and sweats and sportcoats and vests and scarves and...CHAINSAWED.

Gleaming, multi-mirrored corner of luxury exercise nook piled with chrome weights and exercise bicycle and baby-blue foam exercise mat with exercise equipment and...CHAINSAWED.

Our Hero

EXT. CRASH SITE-DAY

Just past the end of the bridge, the Mercedes has punched into a hillside. Except for the tail lights and one rear tire, the car looks like a crushed beer can.

Down the slope of the hill, a TOW-TRUCK and CREW are digging the Mercedes out.

A short, bull-like MAN in a Stetson is digging information out of the Tow-Truck

Crew. The man's in his sixties, but he's still ramrod straight with the real steely-eyed squint that Clint Eastwood can only try to imitate. He's determined, not casual, an old-style iron man.

He's shing a weathered saddlebag over one shoulder. Hand-tooled letters spell out: LT. BOUDE "LEFTY" ENRIGHT/TEXAS RANGER/(1954-1974).

The burly Texas High PATROLMAN charges out of his car, yelling at Enright.

PATROLMAN: You! Old-timer, get away from there! This is an accident zone, the area's restricted—!

Enright ignores him; and a clean-cut young DETECTIVE exits the unmarked car, cutting the Patrolman off. The Detective picks his way down the slope, acting genial, overly polite.

DETECTIVE: Lt. Enright, sir. We heard you might be headed this way. You come over for the big game?

Enright ignores him too.

ENRIGHT: You know why I'm here.

DETECTIVE: Yessir. Something about chainsaw killers. But that was 14 years ago, sir. Besides this was an accident, couple of wild kids raisin' hell.

Enright spits through his teeth.

ENRIGHT: Yeh, one of 'em got so wild he sawed his own head off going 90 miles per hour. Hell. Hell is exactly what they raised.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS HOTEL ROOM-EVENING (LATER)

On the room's TV: shots of the wilderness, as thousands of Texans and Okies overrun downtown Dallas streets crashing, brawling, yelling crazy, etc.

A TV COMMENTATOR recites mayhem statistics (number of people shoved down elevator shafts, etc.), half-jokingly trying to explain "why" this annual weekend runs mad.

ANGLE-ENRIGHT

Enright sits ramrod straight in a chair in the middle of the fancy-tacky room. He's in his shirt and suspenders, staring straight ahead and drinking a bottle of Mescal.

Outside the windows, the sounds of street-riots. A couple of TV-sets drop past the windows, thrown from upper level hotel rooms.

CLOSER ANGLE-ENRIGHT

Enright seems unfazed by most of what's going on. He's slugging down the Mescal, sweating. He's muttering disjointedly to himself:

ENRIGHT: ...Get back...Devil...You got no sleep tonight...No sleep...You ain't that big, Satan. Wrong, all wrong...Get back dammit to Hell...



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Enright's eyes shake in their own private nightmare. He eats the agave worm, up-ending the bottle hard.

Enright lurches up, knocking over his chair. He's seeing something unseen. He steps back unsteadily but hurriedly to an alcove holding the room's walk-in closet.

ENRIGHT: "...I'll take you back to Hell then...."

Enright bangs open both louvered closet doors, reaching for his saddle-bag. Now chainsaws start bursting out of

the closet walls around him, 25 or 35 chainsaws shattering the closet, splintering, hacking.

Enright keeps digging into his saddle-bag.

The rampaging saw-blades barely miss his face, his hands. They shred his pants legs, his hanging jacket.

Enright grabs up a six-gun out of the saddlebag...backs away from the attacking closet.

Now the chainsaws start chewing through the alcove walls on both sides of Enright. The chainsaws' rampage goes on and on insanely.

Enright quick-steps back again. He steadies the gun in both hands in front of him.

X.C.U.—SIX-GUN

On the ebony-black handle of the silver-plated Colt, these words in silver: *My Gun Is God's Gun.*

Glad I Meat Ya'

INT. BIG D HOTEL LOBBY—DAY
G.U.—CAST IRON MINIATURE CHILI-POT TROPHY

A big black dipper drops a smoking mound of chunky chili into the little pot. It overflows, oozing down the trophy pedestal half-covering the FIRST PRIZE emblem on the base. Offscreen: *APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE...*

The lobby is a bad combo of hysterical High Tech and fern. A tiny hi-style GOURMET-YUPPETTE is gingerly presenting the dripping trophy. A gaggle of FOOD-YUPPIES applauding, clinking their champagne glasses.

GOURMET-YUPPETTE: Sooooo... for the second year in a row the Big-D-for-Dallas Chili Cook-Off Champion is...our favorite caterer...The Last Round-up Rolling Grill!...Chef, Drayton Sawyer!!!!...

An eccentric-looking OLDSTER pokes a path through the F-Ys. He's dressed like a gas-station guy in a brown Big Smith overalls—topped by an old Brooks Brothers bow-tie. He doesn't fit in here at all, but...these are Yups who'd rather eat than fuck.

The Oldster grasps the trophy, grinning around at the applauding F-Ys like a wolf. The Gourmet-Yuppette squeals, giving the Oldster a phony little hug. She dips her finger into the chili, sucks it coyly.

GOURMET-YUPPETTE: Ohh, this year! The secret?...You must tell the secret of this fabulously tasty chili!

Unexpectedly the G-Y's teeth click on something in the chili. She almost gags,

pulls a sliver out of her mouth. She holds it up to study it.

The sliver looks suspiciously like a big toenail.

Quickly the Oldster snatches the sliver, winking sagely. He tucks it in his pocket.

OLDSTER (TO G-Y): Wup! One of them hard-shelled peppercorns.

Oldster holds the trophy to his chest, drooling chili all over himself unconcerned—(it's the COOK from Chainsaw 1, styled a little more upscale, gotten into a neat catering business. He's an entrepreneur. It's the Eighties).

OLDSTER (TO THE CROWD): No secret: it's the meat! Don't skimp on the meat. An' I got a real good eye for prime meat. That's it!...

The F-Ys yuk it up, crowding in, guzzling champagne. Stretch lurks at the edge of the crowd doing a radio remote-report. She's muttering into the microphone plugged into an old Uher portable tape-recorder. She's bored stiff. This is how useless her job feels.

OLDSTER (HAMMING IT UP): An' I gotta say! I love this town. It loves prime meat!...

Close Shave, or Vagina Dentata

ANGLE—RADIO STATION ROOMS

Stretch shrieks running through the radio station; LEATHERFACE close behind saving at times widely. She's scrambling up the booth steps. Leatherface stumbles after her...

Inside the upstairs storage room, Stretch frantically tumbles boxes, etc. anything around, desperate to make a wall. Outside she can hear Leatherface clumping up and down the steps banging, buzzing haphazardly.

Stretch cowers fighting to calm herself, muttering:

STRETCH: They live on fear, they live on fear...

Unexpectedly Leatherface bursts through the side of the room right next to her, flailing his chainsaw berserkly. He misses her; slamming his chainsaw deep into the tub of chopped ice, stalling it out in a cloud of steam.

The blood on the chainsaw-blade stains the ice red. Stretch freezes.

Stretch and Leatherface stare at each other across the ice tub. He's panting; she doesn't let herself scream.

Leatherface raises the machine out of the ice...and lays the cooling chainsaw blade against Stretch's bare leg.

She stifles a terrified gasp.

Leatherface slowly slides the wet blade up her inner thigh.



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He's watching her. Stretch has no way out. No choice. She risks a choice, gathering her guts.

STRETCH: How, how mad at me are you?... You're not really mad at me?... (pause) How good are you, huh?...

She's challenging him. Leatherface is puzzled.

STRETCH: How...good...are...you?...
Leatherface cocks his head. Wrong; she should be screaming.

He inches the blade higher on her thigh.

She doesn't blink—barely.

STRETCH: Oh?... Really?...

He blinks, licks his one tooth. She's coming on to him. It stirs him unfamiliarly.

She's slowly, carefully rising up.

STRETCH: Are you... really good?...

Stretch eases herself up to sit on the tip of the chainsaw. She takes it between her legs.

STRETCH: Really, really good?...

Leatherface doesn't know what to do. He licks tooth. He's never had a girl do this. He's fumbling with the starter-mechanism on the chainsaw.

His hands flipping around the starter-mechanism; the blade between her legs.

Abruptly, Leatherface jerks away the chainsaw yank-starting it. But he doesn't turn it on her. He slashes the walls, boxes, etc. watching her in a rage—as if demonstrating for her.

Stretch manages to stay cool.

Leatherface can't take her impassiveness. He's coming undone. Suddenly he runs away.

Croissant and Coffin To Go

TRUCK'S REAR KITCHENETTE

LEATHERFACE is deeply quiet in the kitchenette/grill in the rear of the truck. He's oblivious to the bickering and babbling up front. He's lost in thought. Feeling different.

CHOP-TOP: climbs back, nudges Leatherface.

CHOP-TOP: What'cha think, Bubba? Maybe I'll get a Sonny Bono-style wig-do, y'know: kinda page-boy, long look on the sides, y'know?

Leatherface doesn't respond. Chop-Top props up the Hitchhiker muppet. He's checking his reflection in the chrome kitchenette walls.

CHOP-TOP: Hey, how 'bout it, hanh: Sonny Bono? Ya think? 'I got you babe. I got you babe—?

Chop-Top nods the Hitchhiker's head enthusiastically. They slap five. The Cook yells back excitable:

COOK: Get ready for work, boys! Big pre-game bunch tomorrow means a ton of croissant sandwiches! I love this town!...

CUT TO:

EXT. DALLAS INTERFIRST BANK PLAZA—NIGHT

A wide conjunction of many streets encircling the Interfirst Bank in downtown Dallas. The bank's a 72-story glass monolith outlined in neon-like argon piping that glows green (the color of money). Even at 4 A.M. the eve of the football game, the near empty streets are still beating. Scattered with marauding bands of trouble-seeking knee-walking DRUNKS.

The Catering Truck cruises the plaza. Starts to turn toward other streets. But gets caught at a stop-light by a huddle of large REDNECK ROWDIES. The Rowdies spread around the truck, banging and rocking it.

ROWDIES: We want beer! We want beer! Hey you got Okies in there? Get on it! They 're hidin' Okies an' beer! Hook 'em Horns! etc.

The Catering Truck tries to edge forward, but they won't let it go. They're slugging the truck. They're waggling "Hook 'em Horns" hands.

One BEER-GUT ROWDY smashes his fist through the truck's rear window.

In a flash Leatherface lunges out of the truck's rear door, chainsaw cranking.

The Beer-gut Rowdy shoves a "Hook 'em Horns" hand at Leatherface. Leatherface chainsaws off the hand—flipping it into the truck.

Chop-Top catches the Rowdy's hand.

The newly handless Rowdy doesn't stop a beat. He thrusts his stump-arm at Leatherface in the classic "Fuck-You" gesture.

HANDLESS ROWDY: Oh yeh! Fuck You, ugly!!

Even cut off from its Rowdy, the Rowdy Hand struggles to straighten its middle finger. Chop-Top bobbles the live hand-spooked.

Chop-Top pitches the shaft-shooting hand back to the handless Rowdy. Chop-Top grapples Leatherface back inside. The truck shoots away.

The handless Rowdy stares at his own hand giving himself the finger. Now he feels dimly that something's wrong.

CUT TO:

INT. CATERING TRUCK—NIGHT

Cook's hornet mad, cursing and yelling.

COOK: That's just trashy, dammit! Wasting time on rednecks! Like that stringy farmboy you dragged in—no money in that kinda meat!

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS STREET—NIGHT

The silver truck whips around the corner; roars down a ramp into an underground parking garage.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE—NIGHT

The multi-level concrete parking garage seems endless. From somewhere down in it comes echoing sounds of berserk destruction: ear-splitting CRASHES interspersed with rebel-yells and "Hook 'em Horns" chants.

The silver truck turns down a couple of levels—meets the roof of this racket.

C.U.—OKLAHOMA LICENSE PLATE

The Oklahoma license plate hangs half-off the front bumper of an OLD CAR. The old car's being systematically battered to bits.

A pack of stoned and drunk Texas TEEN-YUPS in designer-preppie outfits attack the old car from Oklahoma. They're ramming their sturdy DATSUN-ZX into it; backing up; ramming it again. They're beating on it, breaking windows with weighted sawed-off pool cues. They're jumping up and down on the wreckage, rebel-yelling, chanting "Hook 'em Horns."

Inside the truck, Cook's leaning over the steering wheel grinning. He's inching the truck along, eye-balling all the designer-label clothes on the TEEN-YUPS.

Handsome wardrobes ripple as a windshield shatters. Costly colors and rich patterns and designer trademarks all over the pack.

Cook nods around inside to the strange brothers.

COOK: Now there you go, boys. See anything that makes your cars wiggle? That's Quality with a capital "K"...

The silver truck creeps closer to the TEEN-YUPS. Cook rolls down his window, tooting the truck's horn. He waves to the T-Ys.

COOK: Hey; you little weasels want some croissants?

ANGLE—TEEN-YUPS

The T-Ys turn from their mayhem, a little puzzled. Then the pack exchanges knowing smiles: next target. A BIG T-Y straightens his orange Texas U. football helmet.

BIG T-Y: Sure you old fruit...

The T-Ys move smugly to surround the silver truck, and close in.

Abruptly the truck's doors pop open.

It's all over in a flash of shredded overpriced fashion. ☹

FILM COMMENT

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1977

\$1.75

Brendan Gill on **THE LAST TYCOON**
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Is Film Criticism
Too Violent?
by Roger Greenspun



CARRIE, AND SALLY AND LEATHERFACE AMONG THE FILM BUFFS

by Roger Greenspun



Leatherface and Sally in *THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE*.

I
 "...one can point out the backs of their heads in the darkness..."

One week last autumn Vincent Canby devoted his regular *New York Times* Sunday column to the subject of movie violence. Canby followers (I am one—and an admirer) could easily enough have identified the piece as the sort of thing he does when there are no important new movies to re-review and when he can think of nothing else to do and yet has to produce the Sunday essay that is, I suspect, the least agreeable and least meaningful part of his job. Last autumn furnished a lot of weeks with nothing else to do, and the violence article is one that most movie critics could write with both eyes closed and their minds tied behind their backs—and that some self-evidently do. Canby's essay offered nothing extraordinary. But the reaction to it a few weeks later in the paper's "Film Mailbag" certainly did. There was an outpouring of grateful and congratulatory letters depicting recent movie trends and, in the words of Robert L. Dilenschneider of New York City, thanking God for Vincent Canby's commentary on violence and taking comfort "that good taste still exists somewhere."

I don't know what it takes to uphold good taste in the Sunday Times. I do know something of what it takes to get

favorable letters, or any letters at all. My theory has always been that if you were Aristotle and published your *Poetics* in the Arts and Leisure section, nobody would notice. But if you wrote, say, about the rudeness of Broadway box-office personnel, you'd get some response. Hit the current decline of values—any values—and the response might grow to a torrent. If Canby had taken a stand on something real in his essay, the very same letter writers would have either (a) fallen asleep over their Sunday paper, or (b) proposed tearing him limb from limb. Reader tolerance in these matters tends toward the straight and very narrow.

Outraged decency is the safest of all editorial attitudes, and potentially one of the dirtiest. For example, look at two articles that appeared last November, one by Stephen Farber in *New York* magazine; the other by Stephen Koch in *Harper's*. Farber cites Koch more or less approvingly, and he cites producers and screenwriters and the obligatory social scientist as well: "Psychologist Seymour Feshbach contends, 'Many people today feel powerless in controlling their lives. That feeling of impotence makes them susceptible to the substitute offered by movies.'" There is much more of the same. The arguments are utterly conventional, and so are the examples: *MARATHON MAN*, *THE OMEN*, *LIPSTICK*,

WALKING TALL (that last example dumps the good in with the garbage). And the tone sustains a level of middle-brow consternation that I associate more with my high-school civics texts than with the sophisticated anxieties of *New York*. Farber does shoot off a few original shockers (e.g., "The only message Hollywood understands is the ring of the cash register"), but generally he stands firmly at the center of nowhere. "The escalation of violence in films is troubling, but there are no easy solutions"—like a senator from a western pulpwood-producing state trying to urge forest conservation. I imagine that he isn't about to knock the powers in cinema that turn out most of the violent movies and coincidentally provide him with his copy, his reason for writing.

But Stephen Koch suffers from no such inhibitions, and his piece on violence, "Fashions in Pornography: Murder as an expression of cinematic chic," leaps into battle with a fury that would cheer the heart of any editor concerned with the vigor of his writers' leads. Unlike Farber, Koch isn't surveying the field. He knows the enemy: "THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE is a vile little piece of sick crap which opened early in 1974 in a nameless Times Square exploitation house, there to be noticed only as another symptom of the wet rot, another step along the way."

He also knows the enemy's allies: "...placed before its intended audience, THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE was a complete failure. Unfortunately it did not then proceed to die the death it deserved. At the last minute it was...rescued by a certain branch of the film intelligentsia, who sent it sailing down the high road to fame and fortune..."

"The first phase was a sudden fashion among the film buffs.... From the buffs, the film was taken up by the Museum of Modern Art... purchased for the Museum's permanent collection... ostentatiously screened in the 'ReView' program... through the museum's prestige... pressed upon... Cannes, which gave it a highly publicized screening.... In Cannes the film naturally enjoyed a dreadfully predictable *succès de scandale*... not long ago the two fine Texas boys who concocted this puling little atrocity found themselves in Hollywood... signing no less than a five-picture contract with Universal Studios."

I've left out most of the nasty asides in that account of THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE caper, the way MOMA and the film buffs combined to impose this atrocity on an otherwise unwilling public and eventually assure its exposure before the jaded thrill seekers of Cannes, thus rewarding its perpetrators with that five-picture contract in Hollywood. Merely correcting some errors in the itinerary may be beside the point, but for the record:

1. Upon its initial opening THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE was not a failure. It was a modest success, primarily in the drive-ins and local theaters around the country, where it was originally released.

2. MOMA did not purchase a print, but rather had one contributed by the distributor, Bryanston.

3. The film played at Cannes three months before its screening in the Review program, so that Koch's implied chain of causal relations is simply wrong.

Ostensibly Koch's piece is about the success of a violent movie, and he does actually devote one paragraph to an inaccurate description of the film ("Obese gibbering castrati grasp snarling chain saws as they chase and kill screaming women..." though in fact just one woman is killed and a different one chased—she escapes—and the chain saw killer—again, singular—may be missing most of his teeth but not, from anything the movie tells us, his sexual organs). But mostly Koch writes about the damnable conspiracy involving low-budget filmmakers, MOMA, and the whole dismal history of film-buff taste. He tends to see buffs the way Joe McCarthy used to see Communists, and with, I suspect, the same disinterested devotion to his cause.

The buffs now "...form a quite cohe-

rent and by no means powerless subculture of the general intelligentsia.... the more advanced buffs have appropriated their own seats in the Museum of Modern Art's screening room; one can point out the backs of their heads in the darkness... in recent times the buff has sometimes surfaced into positions of great influence... The French New Wave... a coterie of buffs... *Cahiers du cinéma*... canonical journal of buff taste... The American Film Institute... is very much under the influence of buff taste.

Buffery, in Koch's view, eschews "serious cinema" and pretty much serious anything: "down with Kafka, up with Douglas Sirk," a rallying cry, I gather, in the Plato's Cave of buffdom. But you can safely remain unserious only so long: "Eventually, even a refreshing sentimentalism must become mere intellectual impotence. Trapped in vicariousness and passivity, committed to intensity rather than authenticity, to fantasy (in Coleridge's distinction) rather than the imagination, the buff's sweet sentimentalism eventually finds its outcome in pornography."

"There is a terrible logic to it...."

I'll say! Frankly I don't think there is any logic to it at all. That incredible coalition of Texans, museum curators, Cannes sophisticates, the AFI, impotent fantasists, and Douglas Sirk against seriousness, Kafka, Coleridge, and Koch rivals any attack on film intellectuals I have seen since Dwight Macdonald likened Andrew Sarris to the Creature from the Black Lagoon way back in the early Sixties, in the dear dead interesting days of *Film Quarterly*.

The name "film buff" of course implies its own form of insult. Nobody who buys this magazine needs it explained that reading *Lamia* half a dozen times puts you on the way to being a Keats scholar, whereas your sixth viewing of THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE brands you a buff, and unhealthy, and maybe even one of the recognizable regulars at the Museum of Modern Art.

In the pejorative sense, I think there are no buffs. People who love old trolley cars or model trains understand what they love and why in ways not so much less intelligent than people who love string quartets or paintings, or than men and women who love one another do. I am not a movie buff to any particular degree, but I'll confess a buff's addiction to ship models. For example, I've never figured why my friends visiting Paris rush off to the Chaillot *Cinéma-thèque*, when they could be upstairs next door losing themselves to the miniature glories of the *Musée de la Marine*.

Koch has buffs for trash, TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE, Douglas Sirk, and Jean Harlow, and against art, Kafka, and the "history of 'high' film taste from Eisenstein to, say, Bergman or Ozu." The op-

position is nonsense. Harlow was a major talent, not a fetish; Sirk has directed Shakespeare, Schiller, and Molière as well as TAZA, SON OF COCHISE; and as for the history of film taste, how do you suppose Yasujiro Ozu found his way into the awareness of American moviegoers, finally to percolate down to the experience of people like Koch? Whether the same will happen with Tobe Hooper, who made THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE, only time and that "five-picture contract" will tell.

But if you want to learn how it all begins, take a look at a real buff rag, *Annie Laurie Starr*, written by Barry Gillam of Katonah Avenue in the Bronx and carefully mimeographed by Moshe Feder. Issue #6, June 1976, runs to twenty-four packed pages, twelve of which Gillam gives over to his personal—and useful—observations on the SEARCHERS. The rest contains his acknowledgments of, and answers to, letters from friends and correspondents about anything from DARLING LILI to STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS (Blake Edwards and Kenji Mizoguchi, for the benefit of non-buffs). One of the answers, to a Wisconsin-based *Annie Laurie Starr* regular, deals with THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE, which Gillam admits he saw only when MOMA ran it (you can almost smell the conspiracy taking place) and after a favorable review appeared, written by me. From MOMA to Greenspan to Gillam; from West 53rd Street to Katonah Avenue—a veritable snowball of buffic tastemaking, gathering new influence as it thunders onward, until it lands, plump, in that five-picture deal with Universal.

But if your mind, like mine, is too simple to grasp the grand design; if you simply read Gillam, you find some interesting insights into the movie and you'll even learn a few things—that it was shot in 16mm, that it was Tobe Hooper's second film, and that his third, presumably the first of the five, deals with "a Texas psychopath who feeds people to his pet crocodile." There you have the seed of a whole new crusade for Stephen Koch.

II

"My family has always been in meat."

Gillam admires the movie but complains that if anything it is not too gory, but too "artistic." He has a point. From its very opening shots of disintegrated half-decomposed corpses perched upon their tombstones under the blazing Texas sun, THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE never lets you forget that its horror is also a crazy beauty. Since the film's action, like its title, leaves little to the imagination, it is free to devote images. The bright sunflowers growing in a white frame house's garden; the delightful porch swing that stands in its

front yard; delicate mobiles of feathers and bones, the end-products of Leatherface's chainsaw craftsmanship; the homey gathering of grandpa and grandma and their pet pooch in the upstairs sitting room (grandma and the dog have been dead for some years now, and they are in an advanced state of decay); the armchair where Sally wakes up, its arms made of her late girlfriend's arms; Sally's dimly-seen flight through the misty darkness, with Leatherface's chain saw roaring in the underbrush behind her—all this has a feel almost of elegance that doesn't belie but does distance the extended scream that is primarily what you hear on the film's sound track.

There's no point pretending that THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE hides a secret life in which it is something other than, or "better" than, it means to be. It is about five young Texans, two girls and three boys, one of them confined to a wheel chair, who come upon an all-male household (fathers and sons) who butcher people for their nutritional value and for the thrill of it. One member, his face gruesomely masked in leather, does the killing. The others apparently do the cooking, except for grandpa, now too far gone to do more than suck an occasional drop of blood. Three of the kids are killed almost at once. The boy in the wheel chair dies later. The girl named Sally (Marilyn Burns) escapes, though only after a night of unspeakable horror.

The problem—I mean this—is that there seems to be nothing of interest here. The film's solution is virtually to embrace its material so as to *force* an interest. Sometimes by jokes (the armchair; the remains of the old folk's dog); sometimes by the camera's ingenuity (the sustained innocence of everything shot from the position of the front-yard swing, for example); sometimes by a grotesque and yet revelatory beauty—it leads you into a relation to its subject that is always more conciliating than you could expect. Not more shocking. The shocks may be assumed from the moment you buy your movie ticket; there's simply no point in trying to build on them. But more intriguing—so that you find yourself moving into the film's world with a sense of pioneering fascination that for the ninety minutes it lasts all but shuts out the overwhelming incongruity of your being there. It is approximately the situation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—for me, and I guess for many, the most terrifying of all stories.

Its progress is the progress of a nightmare. For this kind of movie, that sounds ordinary enough, except that THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE at some level seriously demonstrates it. It follows a rather strict unity of time—less than one full day—and of place and action, and it makes stunning use of such decorum in

its final moments. Possibly the most startling image of the movie is the sight of the morning, daylight, after Sally hurls herself out of the window of the modest dining room that was to have been her death chamber. You had forgotten the dawn, and to rediscover it is again to be confronted, almost against your will, with larger necessities than those governing the madman with his chain saw. The white frame house turns out to be within running distance of the highway, and Sally makes her escape behind a massive trailer truck (a livestock transport, of course) that stops to help her. Suddenly Leatherface, snarling saw in hand, seems all but lost in the traffic. It is the last phase in a shifting sequence of points of view that began with our fixation upon dead things, their hideousness and their fascination, and that ends, without too much relief, in the pressures of daily commerce.

I can fault the movie here and there—mostly for its inexperienced acting, just once or twice for some uncharacteristic horror-film cheap shots—but I can't deny its power, its humor, its caniness, or the intelligence that calculated its simple action. I don't think it "means" anything at all, which ultimately limits its appeal for me. But I do think it almost always understands what it is looking at. That's rare enough, and probably the real source of its reputation among those impotent but influential buff's of Stephen Koch's imagination. THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE hasn't become a cult movie the way some genuinely bad films like THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD or EL TOPO have. Its attractions are too precious, too much a matter of visual appreciation to excite anyone's passionate affection. Its audacity lies in accustoming us—temporarily—to the charnel house. not in what it tells us once we have been there. It has the vision of its distinctive sensibility, but it lacks a context in which to place that vision beyond the ordinary one of our day-to-day living. For its purposes, that is enough. But really to see the world shaken on its axis, you'll have to look elsewhere. Try CARRIE.

III

"After the blood come the boys!"

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE has none, but Brian De Palma's CARRIE has almost all the attributes Koch would like in his buff's ideal movie—including an homage to the trashy past, since its roots go back especially to the teen-market monster madness of the late Fifties. It also has violence, and an uncommonly powerful eroticism, and lots of blood (the underside to its eroticism), and God knows it has its fans. Some of my college students saw it three times within a month of its opening last fall. But then a magazine editor I write for



PHOTOS: UNITED ARTISTS

CARRIE WHITE, HER RISE AND FALL. As wall-flower (top left), prom queen (top right), bug-eyed creature of revenge (bottom left), and nightmare (bottom right).

and greatly respect saw it four times with undiminished enthusiasm, and he became an expert on all the minor character's motivations in a way that might put De Palma and his screenwriter Lawrence Cohen to shame. I don't know where De Palma stands with the most serious film people, and I can appreciate what could have been their uneasiness with him over the years. Recently my own uneasiness has diminished. The "serious" De Palma, from SISTERS (or maybe even from DIONYSUS IN 69) through CARRIE simply begins to make too much sense to be dismissed as the aberration of a displaced satirist. I'm not at all sure that he has ever stopped being a satirist, but his satire now encompasses a cosmos peopled with dupes and demons, and



nobody thinks it is a joke.)

That the girl, that shimmering vision of innocent grace and hopeful sensuality dancing her way to the apocalyptic climax of *CARRIE*, is really first cousin to the passion-seething reptile women of our fevered adolescent Saturday afternoon doesn't tell the whole story about the movie. But it's a start. You must recognize a desirable monster when you see one. That Keats scholar deep in *Lamia* should be prepared for all this, because De Palma continues the traditions of the Romantic Agony. In *SISTERS*, or *OBSESSION*, or now in *CARRIE*, he sees his women double—divided (and multiplied) by something powerfully ambiguous in their sexuality. The two sides of Carrie, the side she longs for and the side

she can't avoid, come together in the potential of her physical being. I can't imagine feminists will care for this, but it seems logical that an action beginning with Carrie's first menstrual flow (itself seen virtually as the result of her own self-gratifying caresses) should climax in an inferno of blood-become-fire. At its crudest, the film's basic proposition might go: "Make Carrie bloody and see what happens." At a level slightly less crude, it would be to prove that the dreadful pronouncements of Carrie's sex-obsessed God-crazed mother are never wrong. She knows the devil when she sees him. And she knows a young girl's adolescence contains the potential for the destruction of the world.

CARRIE develops its meaning (I'm assuming that you know the film's story) precisely along the hazy line where sentimental psychology and supernatural mumbo-jumbo meet. De Palma's penchant for overhead shots now makes sense, because the threats to Carrie all strike from above—beginning with the lobbed volleyball she fails to return in the pre-credit sequence (the camera essentially descends into the movie on that) and ending with the marvelous *implosion* that destroys Carrie's house, incinerates her martyred mother, and sends the girl herself down to her just rewards. Conversely, Carrie's own strengths seem to come from below, from between her legs in the case of the flowing blood, from the low associations of the film's significant graffiti ("Carrie White cats shit," "Carrie White burns in hell."), and from the unhallowed ground under which finally she doesn't rest. A lot of the film's effectiveness derives from the ways it uses or upsets the forces of gravity and inertia, and a lot of its authority derives from that too. *CARRIE* has a cosmology of sorts: a heaven (the high-school prom, where you can dance "Among the stars") and of course a hell. It is like the presence and the history of the two cities New Orleans and Florence, that De Palma used in *OBSESSION*, or like his reading of a man's life in that film out of Dante and an awareness of architectural styles. Not an ironclad program, but a loose range of reference that is very clever and that seems to me the most Hitchcockian thing about De Palma—more Hitchcockian than the employment of a Bernard Herrmann score or the appearance of a shower scene that may (or may not) remind you of *PSYCHO*.

If *THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE* takes on the rationalized progress of a nightmare, *CARRIE* keeps turning dream into nightmare by a process somewhat more complex. The initial shower sequence, the whole ironic progress of Carrie's late blooming from school wallflower to prom queen, the marvelous epilogue that actually is dreamed by Carrie's would-be benefactress—again and again these

subvert our expectations, only to show that the subversion is part of a broader perception of things that we should have held all along. We actually do hold such perception for the prom sequence, during which Carrie becomes angel before she turns demon, and during which we keep hoping for the best while surely knowing that the worst is the only end in view. The gauging of that sequence—really the bulk of the movie—from Carrie's first moonstruck response to Tommy Ross's idiotic ecology poem through her tentative and then magical ascension to the glories of typical American girlhood, through the concomitant (and basically comic) plot against her by the evil Chris and Billy, to her transformation into a bug-eyed creature of revenge; all that (and Sissy Spacek's performance accompanying it) may rank as the most brilliant movie tour-de-force in years. But it counts as something more than a tour-de-force because it connects to an order in which a young girl's romantic aspirations become part of an upward-wishing / downward-doomed interchange that is the central dramatic activity of the film.

In ambition, if not in concentration, *CARRIE* is more violent and much bloodier than *THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE*. But both combine a vitality derived from their delight in horror with an intelligence special to some individual points of view. Neither signals a trend (though *CARRIE* capitalizes a bit on the *EXORCIST* and *JAWS*) but both identify possibly major talents. In the contest of last fall's big openings, from *THE EXORCIST* to *NETWORK* to *THE VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED*, De Palma's film especially begins to look like one of the few recent achievements in American movies. Both films cater mainly to an audience who know what they are seeing—not necessarily film buffs, whose attention tends to lie elsewhere, but the remaining heirs of the unsophisticated moviegoers in Manny Farber's great "Underground Movies," that seminal article which twenty years ago celebrated all the virtues that Stephen Koch in his new article wants to attack. We have no genres left in which movies can be made unselfconsciously (De Palma and Hooper hardly rank as innocents in their fields), but we do have this one genre in which movies still work over a spectrum of responses and actually develop meaning through the pleasures of scaring you out of your wits. Critics like Koch seem to wish they were always seeing ELVIRA MADIGAN or *THE SEVENTH SEAL*—and perhaps some day they always will be. Meanwhile there is work for the unwashed others. The buff hot-line tells me I've just missed something special in a nameless Times Square exploitation house. So will MOMA please re-view *VIGILANTE FORCE* and *MASSACRE AT CENTRAL HIGH*? ♫

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A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

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Women, Power, and Violence

**ROCKY · MARATHON MAN · UNION MAIDS
BARBARA KOPPLE INTERVIEW · CARRIE
HARLAN COUNTY · EISENSTEIN'S OCTOBER**

The Meat Hook Mama, the Nice Girl, and Butch Cassidy in Drag:

Texas itself, the location of the film, is the land of male violence *par excellence*. In American folk mythology, Texas, more than any other state, embodies the cowboy ideal of the lone male who carves out a place for himself with his trusty Colt 45. It is the state where the famous tower sniper picked off students at the University in Austin, the state where John Kennedy was killed. For years Texas was famous for being the only state where a man who caught his wife in bed with her lover had an automatic right (you might even

next--it is obviously the high point of the film. In all the advertisements for JACKSON COUNTY JAIL Dinah is shown limp on an iron cot in the jail cell, her dress pulled up around her thighs. There is no sign that she is about to attack the deputy, though in the film attack him she does. A few minutes after the rape (and why, one wonders not before or during), Minnieux runs amuck, picks up a heavy three-legged stool, and beats the rapist to a pulp.

The widely publicized cases of Inez Garcia, who shot the man who raped her, and Joanne Little, the black southern woman who killed the jail guard who raped her while threatening her with an ice pick, are obviously the inspiration for this scene. But the fact that Minnieux is neither black nor chicano seriously undermines the credibility of the whole incident. In the first place, it is difficult to believe that she could have ever been jailed in the first place. She is white, well-dressed, wealthy, and it's almost impossible to imagine that she doesn't have a lawyer back in California who could spring her with a single phone call. The whole film is built on the cliché "What's a nice girl like her doing in a place like this?" And the only reasonable answer to that question is that she couldn't have really been there.

Even setting that objection aside for the moment, the significance of Dinah's attack on her rapist is seriously undermined by the way in which it occurs. There is no sense of any real, conscious assumption of power here. It is still the old female reaction in place of action. Dinah kills the guard in a frenzy, by accident, in a fit of momentary insanity. JACKSON COUNTY JAIL thus continues to support the old theory that nice girls (and Dinah, remember, is the nicest of the nice) are only aggressive when they are 1) defending their young, or 2) out of their minds.

Since Dinah now belongs to the latter category, she obviously needs a keeper, and the film gallantly provides one for her in the form of the ex-convict in the next cell. For the rest of the film, the convict acts as a combination guide, father figure, and guru, filling her in on the realities of life on the run. At the end of the film, when he is shot down with heavy-handed symbolism during a Bicentennial parade, the camera zooms in on Dinah sitting in a police car staring through the windows with a blank look in her eyes. The pane of glass between her and the outside world suggests that she has not escaped but merely exchanged one cage for another, traded in her old keeper (the convict) for a new keeper (the State). Any chance of her controlling her own life in the future appears to be about as remote as Minnie Mouse pulling off a coup d'état.

In contrast to Sally and Dinah, Claudia Jennings

and Jocelyn Jones who play a pair of female bank robbers in the GREAT TEXAS DYNAMITE CHASE (original title: DYNAMITE WOMEN) are made of altogether different stuff. Take, for example, the way they handle the sexual advances of a horny highway patrol officer who pulls them over to the side of the road, and demands that they either have sex with him or pay a stiff fine. Here we have all the possibilities of another JACKSON COUNTY JAIL: a man with a gun, a lonely country road, and two defenseless women. Only in this case, it turns out that the women are far from defenseless.

Ellie Joe (Jones) takes the officer off into the bushes and gets his pants down around his knees while her partner, Candy (Jennings) sneaks up and neatly disarms him. The two then proceed to chain the hysterical officer to a tree with his own handcuffs (in, by the way, the S-M posture usually reserved for women), and leave a burning stick of dynamite stuck in the ground between his legs. Although the officer never actually goes off (one of the pleasures of this film is that there is so much violence with so little loss of human life), the audience is treated to several minutes of the officer making a fool of himself as he alternately begs for mercy, and trips over his pants trying to stamp out the dynamite.

Obviously what we have here is a reversal of the ordinary sex roles. Highway patrolmen in bondage are as rare in the cinema as active, aggressive women. In fact, when you inspect the GREAT TEXAS DYNAMITE CHASE closely you discover that--except for a few minor changes in plot--it is nothing more or less than BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID in drag. In this case, the two bank robbers are not cowboys, but women, and it is this reversal of sexual expectations that gives the film its special comic flair. After all, who ever heard of women robbing banks without the help of some men. Bonnie and Clyde, and even Ma Barker had her pack of sons.

Even more amazing than their bank robbing is Candy and Ellie Joe's friendship. On the screen women usually either compete with each other or, occasionally, try to kill each other (THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, REBECCA, UNDER CAPRICORN). But Candy and Ellie Joe, like Butch and Sundance, are real buddies who stick together despite the great personal danger. Their comradeship is tested several times in the film. At the beginning Candy has a chance to leave Ellie Joe and settle down with a miner in the mountains--a chance she refuses. The miner, by the way, is also a reversal of the "beautiful blonde" of ordinary gangster films. In this case I suppose he should be referred to as the "gorgeous young," since his habit of running around in bluejeans with no shirt probably does the same thing for

female members of the audience that a woman cut in a bikini would do for males.

Ellie Joe is tempted in a similar way by another reversal: the "sweet young thing." Like the schoolteacher in BUTCH CASSIDY the "sweet young thing" leads with her to settle down and give up her life of crime before she gets killed. In this case the sweet young thing is Slim, a nice mild-mannered guy who is played by Johnny Crawford

Violence done to women on the screen is often used as an excuse for even more excessive masculine violence (DIRTY HARRY, STRAW DOGS). In light of this pattern it seems appropriate that the murder of Slim in this sexually upside down world is the occasion for the only really graphic violence in the entire film. The incident occurs in the middle of a picnic. Ellie Joe and Slim are sitting on the grass (in a scene that once again brings back echoes of BONNIE AND CLYDE), when two police officers jump out of the bushes and shoot Slim down in cold blood. Candy, who has witnessed the entire slaughter from the sidelines, proceeds to kill the two policemen, not with dynamite, but with a gun.

Her choice of weapons is significant. All through the film, dynamite has been associated with a violence that doesn't really hurt anyone--a female, organic violence, diffuse, unreliable, and essentially harmless. But at the end, when she really wants to kill instead of merely frightening, Candy turns for the first time to that supreme phallic weapon, the gun.

The third, and ultimate test of Candy and Ellie's friendship comes near the end of the film when they pull their last bank job. In the chase Candy is wounded, and Ellie Joe has the choice of either leaving her and escaping to Mexico, or staying to shoot it out with the law. But by this time we know that Ellie Joe could no more leave Candy than Butch could leave Sundance, Cisco could leave Poncho, or Tonto could leave the Lone Ranger.

Wiring a car with dynamite she sends it smashing into the police who scatter before it explodes. Then Ellie throws Candy onto a horse, and the two of them ride off into the sunset, to Mexico and freedom. The credits at the end tell us that they are now living in Mexico with lots of boyfriends and plenty of money.

A fairly tale ending, of course, about an ending that still doesn't solve a lot of my questions about women and violence in the cinema. Do we want, for example, to see women taking on masculine roles in films? Do we want an equality of terror? It's hard to say. But after seventy years of whips, meat hooks, and chainsaws, one thing is clear. It's a pleasure to see two women successfully dynamite out a place for themselves on the screen.